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Repatriation and Reintegration in Afghanistan:
The Role of Demilitarisation

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April, 2002

ABSTRACT

For twenty-three years, war has defined Afghanistan. This has not been a single conflict, but a string of conflicts against several enemies, external and internal. This extended period of conflict has resulted in a society that is segmented, economically nonviable, and militarised. It is to this society that refugees and exiles will soon be returning, and in which they will attempt to re-integrate. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that their successful repatriation will be contingent on stability, and that an important task to this end will be to demilitarise Afghanistan's political, economic, and social structures.

In the first section of this essay, the concept of repatriation is addressed as a general topic. Particular focus is paid to the importance of stability as a precondition, as well as alternative theories (as presented in current academic literature) of achieving a level of stability necessary for successful repatriation. The next section introduces militarisation as a factor negatively influencing stability. The third section moves from general concepts to specific factors, defining the context of contemporary Afghanistan and specific issues dealing with militarisation. Finally, the essay concludes by proposing a range of measures that would aid in demilitarising Afghanistan, thus assisting in the

stabilisation of society, and in turn allowing successful repatriation of refugees and exiles while promoting regional peace and security.

Conclusion

Two decades of war have had a substantial impact on all domains of Afghan society. The abrupt demise of the Taliban regime has allowed little time for the development of a deliberate, planned programme to transform Afghanistan from an armed society to peace and stability.

The international community has been involved in repatriation for many years, but the results have been mixed. Success or failure has depended on meeting certain preconditions. Successful programmes – where the ability to return was available to all, safety was ensured, and self-sufficiency possible – have only occurred where societies have stabilised.

Stabilising a society after two decades of war is a complex endeavour. One of the primary challenges is the demilitarisation of a nation that is controlled by warlords, is economically weak, and in which arms are readily accessible. This challenge – the demilitarisation of Afghan society – will be pivotal in creating the conditions under which refugees and exiles will want to return, and in which they can set about the task of rebuilding on an individual and national level.

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Repatriation and Reintegration in Afghanistan:
The Role of Demilitarisation

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Repatriation and Reintegration in Afghanistan: The Role of Demilitarisation

For twenty-three years, war has defined Afghanistan. This has not been a single conflict, but a string of conflicts against several enemies, external and internal. This extended period of conflict has resulted in a society that is segmented, economically nonviable, and militarised. It is to this society that refugees and exiles will soon be returning, and in which they will attempt to re-integrate. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that their successful repatriation will be contingent on stability, and that an important task to this end will be to demilitarise Afghanistan's political, economic, and social structures.

Structure

In the following section of this essay, the concept of repatriation will be addressed as a general topic. Particular focus is paid to the importance of stability as a precondition, as well as alternative theories (as presented in current academic literature) of achieving a level of stability necessary for successful repatriation. The next section introduces militarisation as a factor negatively influencing stability. The third section moves from general concepts to specific factors, defining the context of contemporary Afghanistan and specific issues dealing with militarisation. Finally, the essay concludes by proposing a range of measures that would aid in demilitarising Afghanistan, thus assisting in the stabilisation of society, and in turn allowing successful repatriation of refugees and exiles while promoting regional peace and security.

Repatriation

The term repatriation encompasses a wide range of activities. Zieck defines it as 'the return of nationals by a state either from an overseas part or from another state following hostilities or worse.' (Zieck 1997:1). It can thus be voluntary or forced; spontaneous or part

of an organised, structured effort. For the purpose of studying the situation in Afghanistan, this paper will only consider the voluntary return of refugees from camps or of exiles who have established themselves in other countries.

The right to return to one's country of origin is well recognised. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declared 1992 the Year of Voluntary Repatriation, later extending this designation to the entire decade of the 1990's (Zieck 1997:3). The UN has also underscored the benefits to the international community of voluntary repatriation in several resolutions and statements.¹ The right to return to one's country of origin is also established in international treaty, in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 (UDHR, Article 13(2)).

Since repatriation is recognised as a fundamental moral and legal right, it is essential that every effort be made to ensure the success of repatriation programmes. What is successful repatriation, and what is unsuccessful? That of course is a subjective issue. However, one can distinguish certain essential characteristics identifying successful repatriation:

- incentive to return to the country of origin, as well as the ability to return for all those who wish to do so;
- the ability of the returned population, and the country as a whole, to have a degree of self-sufficiency
- an environment that allows returnees to remain after repatriation, without fear or harassment.

Each of these will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

¹ See UN Document 5/23500 of 1992, which termed voluntary repatriation a key part of maintaining international peace and security; and the Opening Statement of the High Commissioner to the Forty-fourth

Incentive and ability to return

Dolan has been critical of the international community's approach to repatriation, which views refugees as a homogenous group rather than recognise the different circumstances based on gender, age, and family structure. Dolan believes that these different circumstances experienced during flight and settlement, which are overlaid on the factors causing flight in the first place, have as much impact on the decision to repatriate as the alleviation of the immediate causes of flight (Dolan 1997:39-42). As an example in the present context, young Afghan males may have become 'militarised', and choose to remain with warlords rather than return to their home villages. According to Dolan, the UNHCR does not recognise such a nuance, but rather still operates with a working model of the 'refugee' that has not changed since the drafting of the 1951 Geneva Convention – 'an undifferentiated mass of people who fled at a moment's notice' and remain until 'given the signal to return home' (Dolan 1997:39).

Self-sufficiency and economic development

Self-sufficiency, identified above as a characteristic of successful repatriation, is difficult to achieve absent economic opportunity. Some in particularly disadvantageous conditions in exile may in fact return despite lack of opportunity in their home country; however, they will likely remain dependent on aid and neither re-integrate into society nor make a material contribution to the recovery of their homeland. Others in better circumstances will most likely remain where they are if they have better economic opportunity in their country of refuge.

Session of UNHCR's Executive Committee, 1993 which likewise identified the return of refugees to their country of origin as key to global and regional stability.

There is a direct link between militarisation and economic development. Keen posits that economic development is frustrated in areas of internal war due to the benefits derived from poverty and famine by domestic power elites and donor states. He cites the famine in southern Sudan in the 1980s, which was contemporaneous with the civil war. According to Keen, domestic power-brokers – merchants, the military, government officials, and rebel leaders – were able to manipulate the delivery of aid in a way that profited them (Keen 1994). Western donors, for their part, profited in the form of influence in a region of Cold War confrontation. Paradoxically, they were also prone to manipulation by the domestic power brokers, and were hesitant to make the provision of aid contingent on progress in peace negotiations or human rights, lest they lose their strategic edge in the region (Keen 1994). Hence, Keen argues, there is little incentive toward alleviating poverty or famine during civil war (Keen 1998); this phenomenon would work against creating economic opportunity necessary for self-sufficiency, and would therefore decrease the likelihood of success for repatriation programmes.

As a means of ensuring stability, Cox proposes ‘social development’ as an alternative to economic development (Cox 2000:34). This is a holistic model that perceives the political, economic, social, and historical domains of a society as inter-related; insufficient development in one area results in stresses in the others. It is this lack of development that leads to conflict. Planning for stability therefore requires a multifaceted programme that ensures sufficient development in all domains and at all levels of society (Cox 2000:35); Cox explicitly describes the importance of this approach in achieving successful repatriation (Cox 2000:35).

Secure environment

Concerning security, an atmosphere of violence will prevent establishment of an environment free of fear and harassment. It should be emphasised that successful repatriation requires more than an end to active hostilities; it requires an end, or near end, to the root conflict underlying civil disorder as well as the demilitarisation of society. Refugees are unlikely to repatriate without a relatively high degree of certainty that civil war will not return. They are cognisant of the possibility of a rapid return to civil war, particularly if an international peacekeeping force departs the country. In the case of Kurdish refugees returning to northern Iraq, the success of the repatriation correlated to the strength of the protecting force in the area of return (Zieck 1997:231). In fact, the failure of the first repatriation attempt in Afghanistan (1988) has been attributed to economic conditions and security. Sorenson states "Broadly, these are the same considerations that all refugees must consider when making a decision." (Sorenson 1992:256).

Militarisation

There are many barriers to stability as a country attempts to transform itself from war to peace. One of the major barriers, which touches on both economic opportunity and security, is the militarisation of society that occurs during conflict.

When a country has been involved in protracted conflict, there are several results that diminish a society's capacity to provide stability to its people. For example, over the course of the conflict the number of refugees generally increases. The loss of human capital drains the labour base, further exacerbating the pressure on the economy; economic collapse leads to more refugees, and the cycle continues.

In addition, governmental institutions often lose their legitimacy or disappear altogether. This inevitably destroys essential infrastructure (currency, banking, police, education, communications, etc). In those societies that place heavy emphasis on authority

and hierarchy, this can have a negative impact on social stability, as the orderly paradigm with which citizens perceive their place in society is no longer operable.

One of the most deleterious results of the weakening of central authority is the creation of a power vacuum in an environment that rewards those with the most military capital. This “warlordism” fragments society, further decreasing stability. According to Rich, “Warlords have come to be seen as one of the main obstacles to the entrenchment of stable structures of liberal democracy, especially in the developing world.” (Rich 2001:253). In addition to the fragmentary effect of warlordism, it creates a society that not only has ready access to arms, but views violence as a conflict-resolution tool of first resort. Those who have managed to escape to refugee camps may still be exposed to this aspect of armed society. According to one report concerning Afghan refugees in Pakistan, ‘...every refugee family in the camps was armed,’ and the residents were considered a ‘refugee warrior community.’ (Sorenson 1992:262).

Militarisation, Stability, and Repatriation in Afghanistan

In order to analyse the situation in Afghanistan, one must have an understanding of the ethnic composition of the country.

Like many states, Afghanistan’s borders were imposed without regard to ethnicity. Its frontiers are a reflection of ‘The Great Game,’ the strategic competition between the British and Russian Empires of the 19th Century (Vogelsong 2002:6-7). Afghanistan existed as a buffer between Russia, with its interests in central Asia, and Britain, which ruled India (and modern-day Pakistan). Borders divided ethnic homelands; the Durand Line, Afghanistan’s eastern border, separated groups of Pashtuns (Vogelsong 2002:7); likewise, the McMahon/Goldsmid line in the south-west divides Persian speaking Afghans from similar tribes in Iran (Vogelsong 2002:7).

The major ethnic groups in Afghanistan are Pashtun (38%), Tajik (25%), Hazara (19%), Uzbek (6%), and minor ethnic groups (Aimaks, Turkmen, Baluch, and others) (12%) (CIA Factbook, online edition). Within these groups, there are sub-tribes and sects of subtribes, making the delineation of ethnic relationships extremely complex. The Taliban drew its strength from the Pashtuns who lived in the east and south of the country; the largest sub-group of Pashtuns, the Durrani, have traditionally held power and in fact the head of the interim government, Hamid Kerzai, is Durrani. The Northern Alliance, as the name suggests, was a confederation of several groups. Most of the forces, however, were Tajiks or Uzbeks, the two groups that predominate in the north and north-east. One other notable group is the Hazara tribe. Although a substantial minority at 19%, the Hazara have generally been discriminated against and excluded from power (Poppelwell 2002)²; as refugees, they have experienced the worst camp conditions. Unlike other ethnic groups, who could find work among fellow tribe members in Pakistan or Iran, the isolated Hazaras had little opportunity to support themselves after leaving Afghanistan (Shams 2002³).

Although Afghanistan is a tribalised, complex society, one should not assume that obstacles to stabilisation are insuperable. Two related points are relevant in this regard. First, although ethnic affiliation did have some influence on the conflicts of 1979-2002, they were not ethnic conflicts *per se*. Unlike Rwanda, the Balkans, or the Caucasus, the wars in Afghanistan never had the primary goal of eliminating other ethnic groups. Therefore, the ethnic rivalry that exists in Afghanistan has not risen to the level that it would block repatriation to the degree it has elsewhere. The second point concerns the perception of nationality. There are some observers who believe that the people of Afghanistan do not self-identify as a nation, but rather only by tribe (Ottaway and Lievin 2002:1). This view,

² Interview by author, Oxford, January 2002.

³ Interview by author, London, February 2002.

however, is not prevalent among commentators who have primary experience in the country (Mohammed⁴; Shams; Hadid⁵; Poppelwell). While most Afghans have strong bonds within their ethnic groups, there is nonetheless an Afghan national identity that works to the benefit of stability and repatriation.

As mentioned earlier in this essay, economic opportunity is a major element of stability, which in turn is an important precondition to successful repatriation. The economic outlook is not favourable. First, only 12% of the land in Afghanistan is arable, and 80% of that must be irrigated (Vogelsong 2002:13-14). With such heavy dependence on irrigation, the severe drought has had a significant impact on agriculture. According to one Afghan, even areas (such as northern Afghanistan) that have never before suffered water shortages are now “dry barren land” (Ghafary 2002b⁶). Most of the cultivated land is around the major population centres (Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Kunduz, and Herat) (Vogelsong 2002:14). Some of these cities are still controlled by warlords. Warlords have come to possess large tracts of farmland in another manner as well. Many farmers decided to seek asylum in the UK, US, or other western countries. In order to finance their relocation (up to 10,000 pounds in the UK), they sold their most expensive assets, especially their farms and houses. Purchasers in this market were limited to those with large amounts of cash, i.e., the warlords (Mohammed 2002). In this way the militarisation of Afghan society has had a direct impact on economic opportunity in the agricultural sector.

Even if all of the arable land was used for food, the agricultural sector would be unable to provide for the population. However, much of the land is used for the more profitable crop of poppies for opium production. According to the CIA Factbook, Afghanistan has become:

⁴ Interview by author, London, February 2002.

⁵ Interview by author, London, February 2002.

⁶ Correspondence with author, February 2002.

‘ (the) world’s largest illicit opium producer, surpassing Burma (potential production in 1999 - 1,670 metric tons; cultivation in 1999 - 51,500 hectares, a 23% increase over 1998); a major source of hashish; increasing number of heroin-processing laboratories being set up in the country; major political factions in the country profit from drug trade.’ (CIA Factbook, online edition)

This creates a dilemma for post-war economic opportunity. Destroying the opium industry would eliminate a major source of funding for terrorists and warlords, assisting in the creation of a secure environment for returnees. On the other hand, it would have a negative impact on those farmers who are dependent on poppy cultivation and therefore further damage the weak Afghan economy.

Agriculture may also be hurt by the lack of farming experience among refugees. The young males who would have to take on most of the agricultural duties may not have the required experience or knowledge. Many have become urbanised as well, and would not want to return to a rural environment even if they had the skills necessary to take up farming.

There are positive trends concerning economic development. Although agricultural skills may have declined, many refugees have worked in construction, brick-making, and canal-digging (Sorenson 1992:269); the trucking industry, particularly in Quetta, became dominated by entrepreneurial Afghans (Sorenson 1992:267). These skills will all be in high demand in the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

Economic deterioration and militarisation fed off one another in Afghanistan. The conditions described above were, to a large extent, products of two decades of warfare; at the same time, the economic deterioration incited many to join militias, either because that was the only way to earn money or out of attraction to extreme ideology. The money received by the warlords was used to purchase additional

arms; it also gave them money to pay, feed, and bribe young males into their service. Meanwhile, fundamentalist religious movements also benefited from poverty, poor camp conditions, and a culture accustomed to violence; many of these men joined the ranks of the Taliban. Sorenson refers to the "Kalashnikov culture" bred in the camps by economic conditions. The border economy along the Durand Line was based on smuggling, the drug trade, arms dealing, and banditry (Sorenson 1992:251). The militarisation of Afghan society also had external sources: naturally the arms supplied by the US and USSR played a significant role. The Pakistanis, according to many sources, had the most influence. Its military intelligence arm, the ISI, not only supplied arms, but also pushed the mujahedin to attack targets in which they had no interest and in some cases, the ISI even attacked such targets dressed as mujahedin (Sorenson 1992:256).

As the economic problems have spurred militarisation, so has the opposite occurred. Consider the impact of war not only in its moral cost, but also the impact on labour and welfare provision. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, in 1998 there were 98,000 households in Afghanistan headed by a widow; 63,000 households headed by a handicapped person; and at least 45,000 people were treated for war wounds in 1998 alone (Rashid 2001:207).

The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan resulted in an unexpected end to the Taliban-Northern Alliance conflict; because of the suddenness of this development there has been a lack of time to prepare for a transition to a stable society that would facilitate return and re-integration. However this transition is essential, as it will directly influence the number of refugees or exiles who will return, as well as their ability to remain and contribute to rebuilding the infrastructure of the country. As

stated at the beginning of this essay, a successful repatriation programme will be indicated by:

- incentive to return to the country of origin, as well as the ability to return for all those who wish to do so;
- the ability of the returned population, and the country as a whole, to have a degree of self-sufficiency
- an environment that allows returnees to remain after repatriation, without fear or harassment

Success will depend on many factors, but one of the most crucial will be stability. In the Afghan context, this means rebuilding the economic infrastructure while ensuring security and preventing further civil war. Demilitarisation will be an essential element in this process.

A Range of Measures to Demilitarise and Stabilise Afghan Society

A demilitarisation programme in any post-conflict society must be long-term in focus and address deeper issues than the confiscation of weapons. In the present context in Afghanistan, a series of related tracks should be pursued simultaneously:

1. First, conduct a series of concrete measures to dissipate the influence of warlords
2. In support of that goal, establish an economic effort that focuses on job creation and rebuilding infrastructure, weakening the relative economic influence of the warlords
3. Also in support of that goal, construct a *loya jirga* and civil service that are resistant to corruption and the influence of the warlords
4. Establish an international peacekeeping force that is sufficient in number and present in all regions
5. Approach the Afghan problem as a regional issue

Conduct a series of concrete measures to dissipate the influence of warlords

The most immediate threat to stability is the prospect that Afghanistan will return to civil conflict as warlords vie for power. Stability will depend on the degree to which their power bases are weakened.

Warlords in Afghanistan derive their power primarily from two sources: money and arms. The dilemma involved in eliminating the opium crop was alluded to earlier in this essay; however, the influence derived by the warlords from these earnings is more likely to pose a threat to domestic stability than the short-term impact of destroying opium production. One alternative would be for the government or the UN to purchase the crop from farmers and then destroy the harvest. This would be an expensive initiative, but it would allow the farmers time to transition to other crops and have an immediate impact on the economic base of the warlords. Concerning arms, a cash-for-weapons scheme (as implemented in the Balkans), under which individual soldiers would sell their arms to the UN, would deplete the warlords of weapons and manpower. Done in conjunction with other economic reconstruction, such a programme could draw militia members away from the warlords and into jobs rebuilding Afghanistan's infrastructure, while simultaneously reducing the availability of weapons.

There are more radical proposals as well. One Afghan exile leader sees a very clear responsibility for the UN in destroying the warlord culture. According to Essa Mohammed, chairperson of the Afghanistan Solidarity Organisation⁷, the UN should state that if one does not support the interim government 'you are the enemy of your people, the enemy of the country' and are no better than the Taliban. The UN military contingent would use its presence to reinforce the message. Mohammed is completely opposed to any arrangement

⁷ Interviewed by author, 7 February 2002, London.

that compromises with the warlords or offers anything approaching power-sharing, because this only legitimises the place of the warlords (Mohammed 2002).

Establish an economic effort that focuses on job creation and rebuilding infrastructure, weakening the relative economic influence of the warlords

A lack of economic opportunity will be perceived as a barrier by refugees and exiles, except perhaps for those living in the most marginalised conditions. (Hadid 2002; Ghafary, 2002b:4). The present state of the infrastructure creates the need for a number job-creating projects (although the level of international funding will determine the number of projects undertaken and hence the level of economic opportunity). In 1992, 'most of the agency representatives interviewed said they were convinced that development work inside Afghanistan would be necessary for repatriation to succeed' (Sorenson 1992:255). Lack of financial support led to the failure of the development programme. The work never materialised, and this failure became a factor in the return of Afghanistan to war, preventing the demilitarisation necessary for successful repatriation.

Exiles and militia members must be cognisant of improved economic opportunity if these programmes are to be effective. An interesting approach is used by the US military in Kandahar. Four hundred local workers are paid \$10 per day to work on reconstructing the runways at the airbase there. This wage is significantly higher than the local norm. This differential has resulted in a rapid spread of information concerning this opportunity. Already some refugees are returning to Kandahar in search of such work or are leaving the employ of warlords, who are unable to offer competitive compensation (Hadid 2002). If this process is successfully repeated on a large scale throughout reconstruction, it can have a positive effect in both providing stability and a means of self-sufficiency.

Before a significant resurgence in enterprise can occur, however, the financial infrastructure must be rebuilt. According to one source, Afghan merchants would not be able to start businesses in their own country at the present time, since there is no banking system in existence (Mohammed 2002). Furthermore, there are at least five sources printing the local currency (the *afghani*) with no control on its issue (Shams 2002). Such pressing issues must be addressed in order to draw businessmen back, who can then employ Afghans in the reconstruction projects.

Providing jobs and building the necessary financial infrastructure will provide economic opportunity that will be a strong force against the militarisation represented by the warlords. As one commentator put it, with economic opportunity “no one will take a Kalashnikov” (Shams 2002).

Construct a loya jirga and civil service that are resistant to corruption and the influence of the warlords

Establishing representative government will be a key to stability, but difficult in execution. Afghans have lived in martial conditions for over two decades; many young adults do not remember pre-Soviet Afghanistan. The Bonn Agreement has mandated the establishment of a *loya jirga*, a traditional grand council, during the interim administration. The means of selecting members will directly impact the *loya jirga*'s legitimacy and effectiveness.

One approach is to appoint apolitical technocrats, ‘not from tribe leaders, religious figures, (or) regional warlords’ (Ghafary 2002b:3). Such an educated, non-political group would encourage the return of Afghans who fear the appointment of politicians under the influence of the warlords (Ghafary 2002a:2). Proposals providing for appointment power for

regional military leaders should be resisted; such power could, in the end, divide the country and prevent UN monitors from gaining access to certain regions.

Concerning civil administration, the interim government should consider returning to the Afghan tradition of appointing administrators from outside the district. For example, the administrator for Qandahar would not be from the area nor even a Pashtun; that person would be, for instance, a Tajik from the north. This method has served in the past to discourage corruption and factionalism, and would work to diminish the influence of the warlords.

Create an international peacekeeping force that is sufficient in number and present in all regions

As currently envisioned, the international peacekeeping force is small and restricted to Kabul. The interim government will have difficulty countering the influence of the warlords and demilitarising society unless the force is present in all major regions, and in sufficient numbers to discourage warlords from asserting supremacy. Many Afghans feel there is no chance for the interim government to succeed without a significant international military presence (Ghafary; Hadid; Shams; Mohammed; Poppelwell).

Approach the Afghan problem as a regional issue

Although the influence of militarism has been most visible in Afghanistan, the phenomenon is endemic throughout Central Asia. Any approach that focuses on Afghanistan in isolation will likely be ineffective in securing long-term stability (Olcott 2002:1-2)

For example, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan constitutes a significant threat to the regime in Tashkent; it operates out of bases in Tajikistan, causing severe tension in the relations of these two neighbours (Rashid 2002:34-35). The international community should

consider a regional engagement approach, using diplomatic and economic incentives to diminish the root causes of militarisation and instability.

Other countries in the region have an interest in the demilitarisation and stability of Afghanistan. Pakistan would prefer to shift security resources committed to the Afghan border; it could also benefit economically from much of the rebuilding to be done in Afghanistan. Iran would gain trade benefits if it could market its goods to a revitalised Afghan market and transport other goods through Afghanistan on their way east. All regional states, and the Western world as well, would benefit from the loss of safe haven to terrorists and extremists.

A Contrasting View

Ottaway and Lieven, writing in a Policy Brief of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, believe that an approach emphasising a strong central government in Kabul is “unrealistic” and “cannot possibly work” (Ottaway and Lieven 2002:1). They propose a more modest endeavour, aimed only at creating peace and restoring basic economic functions. Rather than providing aid to the central government, they propose distributing it directly to the regions. In fact, they see only a very modest role for the national government; Kabul would only provide a meeting place for the regional leaders to assemble and discuss the few items of interest that have application throughout their loose confederation (Ottaway and Lieven 2002:6).

Ottaway and Lieven believe this is in the best interest of long-term stability. By limiting Kabul’s role, regional leaders would not vie to control the central administration. Furthermore, the warlords would have a vested interest in maintaining tranquility since aid would be contingent on peaceful conditions.

Ottaway and Lieven are correct in questioning whether the international community has the will to provide the substantial funds needed to carry out an ambitious reconstruction

of Afghanistan. However, their minimalist approach has several weaknesses. First, they advocate dissecting the Afghan nation into a conglomeration of mini-states. Such a programme would by its nature prevent substantive demilitarisation, since the plan provides the warlords with more authority than the central government. It also raises the possibility of irredentism, on the part of Tajiks and Uzbeks, or separatism, with the Pashtuns. Ottaway and Lieven therefore neglect the regional implications of their approach.

Their minimalist approach to economic reform also seems likely to decrease the prospects for demilitarisation and stability. Warlords, rather than having a vested interest in peace, would have an interest in keeping conditions unstable in order to ensure the continuing need for international aid to their region. Poverty would likely continue, perpetuating the types of root causes that lead to militarisation and conflict.

Conclusion

Two decades of war have had a substantial impact on all domains of Afghan society. The abrupt demise of the Taliban regime has allowed little time for the development of a deliberate, planned programme to transform Afghanistan from an armed society to peace and stability.

The international community has been involved in repatriation for many years, but the results have been mixed. Success or failure has depended on meeting certain preconditions. Successful programmes – where the ability to return was available to all, safety was ensured, and self-sufficiency possible – have only occurred where societies have stabilised.

Stabilising a society after two decades of war is a complex endeavour. One of the primary challenges is the demilitarisation of a nation that is controlled by warlords, is economically weak, and in which arms are readily accessible. This challenge – the demilitarisation of Afghan society – will be pivotal in creating the conditions under which

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refugees and exiles will want to return, and in which they can set about the task of rebuilding
on an individual and national level.

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